DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 386 581 CE 069 837

AUTHOR Walker, Gary
TITLE Dilemma and Directions for Youth Social Policy.
INSTITUTION Public/Private Ventures, Philadelphia, PA.
PUB DATE Sep 94
NOTE 23p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; *Disadvantaged Youth; *Employment Programs; Federal Government; *Government Role; *Job Training; Needs; *Policy Formation; Postsecondary Education; Program Effectiveness; *Public Policy; Secondary Education

ABSTRACT

Over the past 2 decades, a considerable and consistent body of evaluation evidence has accumulated indicating that the public policies and programs created during that period for disadvantaged youth have not resulted in significant, long-term changes in the lives of those youth. Data say that an increasing number and percent of youth are disadvantaged in their crucial, formative years. If public social policy is to help these young people achieve decent economic lives, its approach must be changed. For the past several decades, social policy has attempted to improve the long-term economic prospects of youth from poor communities primarily by means of a wide variety of discrete, short-term programs aimed at specific problems and age groups. Even when longer, more comprehensive programs have been tried, they have usually succumbed to funding and implementation difficulties. A better tactic would involve a developmental approach. Such an approach would include the following: (1) a practical, compelling, and limited theory of action; (2) a problem to solve and ways to measure its solution; (3) joint ventures between sectors; and (4) an emphasis on private involvement and capacity building. To implement such a plan, a new institutional vehicle may be needed---neither liberal nor conservative, Democratic nor Republican, but only representative of American practicality. It should be: (1) a special, public-private vehicle to test a new approach on a serious scale; (2) funded by diverting from current agencies that portion of their youth funding that currently goes to coordination or community process initiatives; and (3) required to establish goals and measures and report publicly on progress toward achieving them. Establishing such a vehicle may be politically impossible. That does not prevent new approaches from being tried, as they are being even now. (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 386 581

Dilemma and Directions

for

Youth Social Policy

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A. Zickerman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Gary Walker
Public/Private Ventures
September 1994

CE069837

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

This essay addresses two broad issues. First, why are public social policies and programs for disadvantaged youth[1] consistently short-term, fragmented and problem-focused? Is it public mean-spiritedness? Racism? The honest error of trying the narrowest solution first?

And second: since those policies and programs aren't, according to the evidence, changing youths' lives over the long term, what should we do differently? Simply the opposite of what we're doing now? What does that mean?

THE DILEMMA

Over the past two decades a considerable and consistent body of evaluation evidence has accumulated indicating that the public policies and programs created during that period for disadvantaged youth do not result in significant, long-term changes in the lives of those youth.

That short-term, fragmented and problem-oriented strategies do not permanently change a poor youth's economic prospects may not to some come as much of a surprise. But to many of those who have been involved in these policies and programs--as funders, policymakers, administrators, operators and advocates--it has come as a shock. What we have done over the past two decades, one federal official recently said, is a failure.

At the same time there is also considerable data, from a variety of sources and on a variety of indicators, which says that an increasing number and percent of our youth are disadvantaged in their crucial, formative years. When that data and the evaluation findings are set beside the new

---

[1] For the purposes of this paper "youth" means individuals from early adolescence through young adulthood; "disadvantaged" refers to neighborhood and family conditions that are highly associated with poor economic outcomes as youth from those conditions become adults.

economic reality--a reality in which it is more difficult for the average young worker to earn enough to support a family than at any time in the last 50 years--the prospects for large numbers of our youth look grim indeed.

If public social policy is to help these young people achieve decent economic lives, obviously it must change its approach. More of the same is not, based on the evidence, a sound strategy. But before we try to construct a different approach--one that presumably would not be composed of short-term, fragmented and problem-focused policies and programs--it is useful to understand why the current approach is what it is.

THE CURRENT APPROACH

For the past several decades social policy has attempted to improve the long-term economic prospects of youth from poor communities primarily by means of a wide variety of discrete, short-term programs aimed at specific problems. Each program was usually initiated to address primarily one of a variety of problems: educational skills, drug and alcohol dependence, early parenthood, job skills. Each program was usually aimed at a specific age group. Each program has tended to be from three to 12 months in duration, with most falling in the three- to six-month range. The distribution of public resources has not been even, and has tended to focus on late adolescence/young adulthood rather than the teenage/early adult years--in good part because that's when the youths' problems become most apparent, and have consequences for other citizens and the public till.

As noted earlier, evaluations consistently indicate that these brief, problem-focused programs do not produce long-term change in problem behaviors, or in economic self-sufficiency. Many do result in immediate improvements in behavior--but the improvements consistently fade away. These results have produced a call from many youth advocates and program operators for a social policy for disadvantaged youth that is comprehensive, holistic and developmental in nature, rather than discrete and problem-oriented.

In fact, over the past decade many local youth programs, in response to their young clients' multiple problems and needs, and to evaluations indicating that single focus programming did not produce long-term effects, consciously expanded to address several problems simultaneously. Many added personal counseling and other supportive services. Some attempted to involve the youth actively in community service, in local political issues, and even program governance, in order to engage youth interest and to promote leadership and citizenship skills. There have also been and are numerous national, state and local efforts to coordinate or integrate the various services that different programs provide.

These efforts to provide expanded, multiple services; to coordinate or integrate existing services; and to more actively involve youth in program and community issues, represent an interim operational step between the single problem focus of many early youth programs and the more recent call for comprehensive, holistic and developmentally-oriented programming. These efforts have been driven not by theories of human development, nor by analyses of the optimal role for social policy in a youth's life, but by the compelling and immediate needs of poor youth, and by the desire to use current resources and services more responsively to meet those needs.

These expanded programs have typically been very difficult to implement and fund because their development has not been accompanied by corresponding changes in public policies, public agency regulations, and funding rules and processes. The few evaluations that have been carried out on these more complex programs largely document the implementation and funding difficulties, and thus provide little evidence that the expanded approach changes lives much better than the single focus approach did. These difficulties and their documentation have provided ammunition to those youth advocates and policy experts who call for a quicker move to more fundamental changes in our youth policies and funding mechanisms. They have also provided ammunition to those who believe that not much can be accomplished for disadvantaged youth by means of public social policy.

Thus the current approach to social policy for youth, and its progeny of incrementally improved programs, have delivered us to a crossroads. Or a dead end. The metaphors have subtle differences in implication--the common thread, given the number of youth affected, is alarm.

Our experience seems to tell us what not to do--or at least what not to expect. But it is hard to shape good policy around negative lessons. It is also difficult, based on negative lessons, to sense what is possible policy, or even to pause to ask that question, for the proposed solutions to failed policy are typically at the extremes: do whatever it takes, for those who still have hope that social policy can make a difference; do nothing--or at least do nothing positive--for those who have lost hope.

But effective and coherent policy rarely emerges out of the tensions of extreme positions. Understanding the parameters of possibility that our past experiences imply would be a helpful first step. That understanding may also open up avenues for policy exploration that are substantively worthwhile well beyond our current approach and its incremental offspring, and potentially more durable and effective than the extreme reactions they have engendered.

The next few pages speculate on the primary causes of our current approach to social policy for disadvantaged youth.

SOCIAL CULTURE

The major determinant of our current approach lies in American social culture's long and deeply-held view regarding the purpose of public social policy. That view--widely shared across the mainstream political spectrum--is that public social policies and programs have a specific and limited use: to solve problems that have no private solution. In this view, social policies are not and should not be a basic and everyday part of a citizen's life. They are to be targeted at those definable problems that private actions do not solve.

This view, shaped by both the European and American experience of our early settlers, and deepened by the American economic growth and success story, is oftentimes expressed by the belief that humans "develop better" in the incubator of private local influences and institutions, and by the concern that those in public programs are "stigmatized" by that fact. These views, widely held as they are, become self-confirming, and thus are beyond the reach of rational change: They are part of what America is, and what it is to be American.

If you mix this culturally constrained view of public social policy with a concern about the inherent limits of government competence in a democratic society (a concern shared by many liberals as well as most conservatives), and with a legal system largely based on protecting individuals, families and private organizations from government intervention, it is unsurprising that our country's approach to social policy for youth has focused on creating discrete, short-term approaches to particular problems. That approach is simply a consistent reflection of our historical view about the purpose and use of public social policy, leavened further by a distrust of governmental competence and intent.

What is dramatically noticeable is that this limited and distrustful view about the use of public social policy is also conveniently consistent with a disregard for poor people, a dislike for certain ethnic and racial groups, and a philosophy of progress based on a crude reading of Darwin or other natural science. Those views have throughout American history had vocal adherents--whose intensity of belief has amplified their voice and influence--so that naturally their views have been spotlighted by advocates for a more activist social policy. And rightly so, for clearcut mean-spiritedness or wrongheadedness always generates more overt political influence than the implicit and historical limits on the use of social policy that are part of the "deep stuff" of American social culture.

But it is a mistake, both in fact and strategically, to leap from the terms of daily political battles to the conclusion that mean-spiritedness and wrongheadedness are the sole or even primary source of our country's limited use of public social policy for disadvantaged youth. Rather it is historical

experience which has sunk roots and become part of what it means to be "American." That part of our common identity that believes in limited social policy and distrusts the competence of government has only been strengthened in recent years by the failure around the world of social systems based on a broader view of the use of public social policy, and on the potential competence of government.

Thus at the same time our limited approach to public policy has been shown not to achieve much for disadvantaged youth, a broader approach to the use of public policy has been shown not to work for societies as a whole. The latter failures may not seem relevant to America's youth to either advocates or logicians, but they have meaning in the political arena where policy is formed, and in the halls of common sense. For they not only corroborate and justify deep assumptions of American social culture; they also satisfy the need for continuity in our self-definition in times of otherwise seemingly endless change.

To argue that the cultural depth of our limited social policies, and its recent corroboration from around the world, are irrelevant, given the scope and seriousness of the problems facing our youth, or to argue that America is hypocritical in its implementation of this deep view on the use of public policy, and now needs to make disadvantaged youth an exception--both positions would be true. And yet I think both will be futile. All social cultures contain exceptions to their deep values, and they rarely make new exceptions by the painful reminder of past ones, nor because of moral argument. They do so, if they do at all, because of the belief of imminent total collapse, or the sheer political clout of those advocating the exception. Painful as it is for those who work with and for disadvantaged youth to realize, we are in fact nowhere near those conditions, nor are we likely to be in the foreseeable future.

POLITICAL SYSTEM

The workings of our political system mesh well with our deep and limited view toward the use of public social policy. Frequent elections; wide, thin emotion-tapping media coverage of social

issues; the wide availability of data about social issues and public programs; problem definition largely by interest groups--these and other aspects of our political life help produce and sustain a short-term, discrete and problem-oriented social policy approach. For only that approach can offer the promise of solutions, and the conceptual justification for changing solutions, within the relatively tight time frames between elections.

Since our political system is the critical forum for policy debates that touch on deep cultural values, the convenience of the discrete, short-term and problem-oriented policy approach to that system makes it an imposing ally to a limited view on the uses of social policy.

Equally imposing is the governmental apparatus currently in place to create and administer public social policies. That apparatus is a mirror reflection of our discrete, problem-oriented approach, in both the legislative and executive branches, which are divided into a labyrinth of committees, subcommittees, agencies and departments.

Thus the structure of our political system, including its decision-making and executing apparatus, is arrayed formidably in favor of the current policy approach. It does not prevent our political leadership and the electorate from deciding that the old approach has not worked and that a new approach is needed, or from generating a broad new rhetoric about what must be done--though those actions will be difficult enough. It does significantly impede the actual funding and implementation of an approach that is in fact significantly different than the current one.

LACK OF AN ALTERNATIVE

The third reason our conception of social policy for youth is what it is--and is in a holding pattern--is that we have no workable consensus among our political leaders, or even in the youth field itself, on a clear, concrete and compelling vision of what a different approach should be. The broadest consensus we now have among those involved in social policy is that whatever approach we do take, it should not be short-term, discrete and problem-oriented. But knowing what we

don't want is not substantively or politically engaging. And because the opposite of a limited approach is an expansive one, the negative stance has no apparent limits to the uses or costs of whatever its actual policies might be, and thus cannot effectively address either the cultural or political factors discussed above, much less the widely perceived need to better control the federal budget.

We can bemoan our social culture's limited view toward the use of social policy, and our short-viewed political system, and our media's thinly veiled appeal to hysteria regarding disadvantaged youth--but without a compelling alternative the moaning more and more resembles an exercise in political correctness. For it is not too difficult to understand why an increasing number of leaders--community and national, public and private, Republican and Democrat--question the prospect of public social policy to have significant affects on the lives and futures of disadvantaged youth. The evidence to date is on their side.

Are we at the end of the road, not just for the current approach to youth policy, but perhaps, since there is no clearcut and compelling alternative, for <u>any</u> positive approach? If necessity is indeed the mother of invention, a strongly felt sense of nothingness ahead might be a useful prod to the imagination.

There is an even grimmer prospect. For as noted earlier, our cultural view on public social policy, and our political system for creating policy and its executing apparatus, interact powerfully to sustain the status quo. That interactive force, combined with the lack of a powerful alternative and the felt need by many goodhearted people to do <u>something</u> positive about the problems experienced by an increasing number of our youth, will probably conspire to maintain the current approach--in spite of widespread agreement that it is not effective. In short, inertia plus continuing advocacy plus decency will create an exception to the evidence. But budget realities, and the evidence that the approach is not effective, will most likely continue to decrease the resources dedicated to special policies and programs for disadvantaged youth.

Under this scenario our mechanic's approach to social policy for disadvantaged youth, and its welter of little programs, will not ever totally disappear, but will simply continue withering. A diminished, marginalized survival of the current approach--enough to ameliorate social guilt and feed a skeleton industry but with no pretense of forward movement or enduring effectiveness--is thus a very possible picture of the future of youth social policy. It is to me the gloomiest of prospects, for it mocks hope, honesty and possibility, all in one meager gesture.

DIRECTIONS

The above discussion is bleak, but it is useful to know the obstacles--both the obvious ones, and those that lie beneath the surface--before proceeding to develop new initiatives to assist youth from poor neighborhoods and families. The obstacles provide a prism that can help shape the strategy, content and language of new ideas, and increase their potential for effectiveness.

There are also existing positive factors to build on. For one, some of the very programs that we now call "failures" have in fact had significant impacts on their youthful participants' lives. Because those impacts were short-lived, we call the programs ineffective, or even failures--but our characterization flows from our expectations, which turn out to have been consistently unrealistic. If we are willing to confront the reality that there are no quick programmatic solutions to the complex array of problems that face an increasing number of our young people, it opens the way to see these programs that are proven successful in accomplishing modest objectives as the small successes that are a necessary part of any larger change. Then the last two decades of social program experimentation become not an entirely futile search, but rather an enterprise that produced some well-turned pieces to a puzzle whose larger shape we have not yet perceived.

Still, these successful pieces are a small consolation--for without having the larger shape of the puzzle to which they belong, it is not clear what to do with them.

One source on which to build the larger shape of a new approach are several strategies which have over the past decade been formulated (and to a modest degree implemented). No one of them alone meets the challenges laid out earlier, but each contributes in varying degrees important insights to the shaping of a more compelling strategy.

One strategy has simply been to give no prominence or priority to the issue of social policy for disadvantaged youth, and to aim instead for universal, non-targeted policies that work for all youth. The new School-to-Work Act; the call for a "service ethic," with its accompanying Corporation for National Service; and the youth apprenticeship movement, are all recent examples of this approach. This approach has the advantage of going beyond a focus on the problems and deficiencies of certain groups of youth to setting social expectations, and accompanying public social policies for all our youth.

Although proponents of this approach usually have no intention to overlook the more disadvantaged--in fact some view it as a politically astute "cover" to increase resources for that group--the results have not been and most likely will never be satisfying in terms of the share of resources that actually go to disadvantaged youth. The public till is simply not deep enough. Thus the funding for these "universal" initiatives is without exception too modest to achieve real universal coverage. And institutional and political interests naturally align toward devoting those limited resources to activities that can achieve success as quickly as possible--so that the initiatives can survive politically.

The universal approach has another problem: by not admitting that disadvantaged youth do have more problems, it is rarely constructed to actually confront those problems. It is substantively deficient.

Another strategy has developed around the words "coordination" and "integration" of services. An advantage to this approach is that it avoids conflict with the majority culture's view about public policy. It at least sounds cost-efficient (though limited experience does not bear that out).

But its implication--that efficiency in structure and service delivery are the answers to the obstacles that disadvantaged youth confront in achieving economic self-sufficiency--is substantively weak. It proceeds from no analysis or theory of how humans develop and achieve success, but from the assumption that putting what pieces we now have together, more efficiently, is sufficient to achieve our aims. It appears to say that successful human development is a function of well-delivered public services.

The limited evidence we do have about this approach is that its implementation is very difficult, that scarce resources get absorbed in the process of coordination and integration, and that it does not seem to result in substantially better outcomes or long-term impacts. It may represent an improvement in efficiency of service delivery--in itself a worthwhile goal--but it is neither guided by nor produces a compelling vision of how public policy can improve lives.

The most constructive and useful approach to date has been the notion that our public youth policy must be substantively developmental in nature, and must address the basic needs that all humans have for healthy development. This approach emphasizes not particular deficiencies, but the growth process itself. It says that that process has certain universal elements which, if not addressed, make successful development less likely. This notion relies heavily on the work of developmental psychologists, and begins to establish a firmer conceptual and evidentiary basis for a new approach to youth policy.

The advantages to such an approach are considerable. For one, it has a substantive vision and theory--this at least advances the possibility that our policies, as they proceed through the political process, might emerge with some coherence, and thus actual impact on youthful lives. It also acknowledges and underscores the profound formative influence of private life, such as peers, neighborhood activities and opportunities, and families, and does not allow us to avoid dealing with those influences in positive and supportive ways.

But the developmental approach as currently formulated also has drawbacks when viewed through the prism of American social culture and politics. First, there do not exist convenient measures of developmental progress--human development is more like a zig-zag than a straight line. Thus it is difficult to see how the short-term need for success that our political system has can be satisfied. In addition the approach seems open-ended and without limits. Since almost everyone can think of developmental needs in his or her life that were not satisfied, this approach seems to contain the prospect of social policy that would meet all key needs for all youth--an assault on our social culture's view on public policy that, combined with its budgetary implications, make it an unlikely candidate for widespread adoption. This latter point is highlighted by much of the literature on which the "youth development" approach is based, which speaks of optimal development and full human realization, which are not, in our society, the jobs of public policy.

Nonetheless, the developmental approach offers a substantive basis for a new approach. Combined with the insight of the coordination/integration approach that our current institutional structure is simply not adequate to do much more than deliver the discrete services and programs of the past, and the strategy of the universalist approach that simply focusing on the problems of individual poor youth is neither substantively nor politically effective, we have the foreshadowing of a different approach to public social policy for disadvantaged youth.

This brief essay does not pretend to leap from this foreshadowing to a clear and coherent picture of a new approach. But by processing the contributions of these approaches through the prism of the determinants and maintainers of our current approach, we can begin to articulate guiding principles and principal elements of what a new approach might look like--and of what it will take to implement it. The following pages try to clarify what those principles and elements might be.

1. A Practical, Compelling and Limited Theory of Action.

Our current approach is theory free. It simply tries whatever ideas have gained some measure of acceptability to confront whatever problem is deemed most urgent, and occasionally tests them rigorously to see if they not only confront the problem but change lives permanently in the process.

The flexibility this approach provides is admirable; it fits well with Americans' pride in being practical, and not enamored with complex ideology or academic theory. In actual practice, it has meant that the credible knowledge we've gained is spotty and patchwork, and that we're not always sure what theory of action was in fact implemented and tested. Most important, the lack of emphasis on theory in our current approach has produced no counter pressure to the inclination of our cultural values and political system to embrace short-term, discrete and problem-oriented policies and programs.

A different approach, if it is to avoid these natural pulls, will require substantive theory. We'll have to say what it is that we think should be done, why, and what it will accomplish.

As noted above, "youth development" theory comes closest of the current efforts to shape a new approach that has content with some weight of credibility. But its language is still too professional and academic for effective use in the political and media arenas. The code words used to summarize its content--"comprehensive," "long-term," "holistic"--have no compelling content that can be used in policy or public debate, and are so open-ended that they present an easy target for fiscal arguments, and for appeals to basic American social values. Their open-endedness--often concretely exemplified by an extensive list of human needs for healthy development--is also likely to offend the personal experience of many adults who have achieved economic self-sufficiency but know that they did not have the benefit of many of the items on that list.

The creation of a practical, limited and positive theory which can be stated in recognizable, everyday language, will not be easy. For one, it requires setting some priorities. Those priorities will not emerge easily, for the work to date on developmental theory cannot convincingly discern the importance of one element over another. Trying to set them will surface legitimate substantive disagreements, as well as simply arouse those whose activities do not seem destined for priority status. But they must be set.

Second, it will require the use of marketing and public relations skills to formulate a limited theory. Those skills are frequently viewed as distasteful to serious social policy. But without them, the dull, often impenetrable jargon of social theory is unlikely to be either compelling or practical.

The personal experience of ordinary Americans who have achieved self-sufficiency may help provide the language and limits that youth development theory needs. For except for those rare souls who succeeded entirely in spite of their surrounding world, most Americans who have succeeded did grow up with some physical safety for healthy play and recreation; some adult support and guidance; some opportunities for work and learning; some visible and achievable examples of what conventional, successful adulthood looks like; and some opportunities to participate positively in their surrounding world. These are the stuff of later economic success.

That kind of ordinary experience may help provide the ordinary words, and the sense of limits, that are needed to convince Americans that a new approach to social policy has sensible, practical and concrete priorities--and is not an attempt to meet the seemingly endless list of human needs.

2. A Problem to Solve, and Ways to Measure its Solution.

Such an approach, built on human development theory and the experience of ordinary Americans, may not sound rooted enough in the kind of problems that generate broad support for a new initiative, and too individual-oriented to allow for timely results. In short, we may shape a

compelling, practical and limited theory of action, but the specters of social culture and political system still loom.

But in fact a social policy for youth built on human development theory is attempting to solve a problem--that of inadequate private community infrastructure to promote healthy development. The problems we confront are environmental, not individual.

By keeping our new approach limited to a few key deficiencies in that infrastructure--for example work experience, recreation, supporting adults and the like--we should be able to generate sound arguments as to why the private influences in poor neighborhoods are unable to generate that infrastructure, why the public sector must step in, and what that intervention can be expected to produce.

What public intervention in the problem of basic private community infrastructure for healthy youth development can be expected to produce comes in three distinct stages. The first is simply an increase in that infrastructure, and in youthful participation in that strengthened infrastructure. That increase, and youth's participation in it, will be documentable, measurable, indeed countable--it is not a process, but activities, opportunities and events that youth take advantage of. If that increase in fact happens, and youth do participate in it, it should simultaneously produce a difference in youths' use of time. They should be spending more time with adults, in positive recreational activities, and in community service projects, to provide just a few examples. That difference in use of time is likely to be the first measurable impact on individual behavior that we'll see from an approach based on human development theory. It is the first step in preventing problems from occurring.

The second stage of outcomes is that the individual behaviors--or problems--that society wants to decrease, should in fact do so. But that will take time, and will only come after the documented increase in infrastructure, and change in youths' use of time. If we cannot build into our political system the willingness to accept the first stage of measurable outcomes as measures of success--as

indicators of prevention capacity--we have little chance of ever reducing the behavior problems that concern us all.

The third stage is adult economic sufficiency. That stage is not a necessary outcome of the first two, for it depends on access to economic opportunity--and a poor community which has strengthened its infrastructure for healthy youth development may still have few internal economic opportunities, and little access to those outside of its physical boundaries.

3. Joint Ventures Between Sectors.

One of the helpful byproducts of a greater focus on human development theory as a foundation for new social policy is its revelation that social policy and its institutions alone probably cannot produce most of the individual outcomes that come in stages two and three--viz., problem behavior reduction, and especially economic self-sufficiency. Three of the more obvious components of any human development theory--some sense and areas of physical safety, opportunities for work experience, and visible examples of a successful adult future--cannot reasonably be accomplished without efforts by law enforcement agencies, by the private for profit sector, and by local communities themselves. In short, the services usually provided by social policy institutions--no matter how well integrated or coordinated--do not begin to cover many essential elements of healthy development.

The conclusion that social policy and its constituent institutions and activities can contribute to but not cause lasting change in individual lives has important implications. It removes a purpose and goal that has dominated but so far eluded much of conventional social policy, and which all available evidence indicates is illusory. It acknowledges that building community and individual capacities--and all the worthy reductions in problem behaviors that attends this capacity building--may be the most we can expect from social policy initiatives and institutions acting alone. Social institutions and communities acting alone can accomplish some key elements of problem reduction and healthy development, but not all the key elements.

More extensive and lasting outcomes probably depend on the capacity of communities, social policy organizations, law enforcement agencies and private for-profit companies to come up with various joint ventures. I use the words "various joint ventures" rather than "intersectoral coordination" or "service integration" because experience to date is that different institutions and sectors work best together around a project or initiative that has clear goals, concrete products, plays to the strengths of each party and also provides important rewards to each party's core goals and interests. Thus the world of social policy is responsible for developing a coherent theory to

solve important social problems, but implementation of that coherent theory will involve many different definable projects and ventures. It is probably more important that we ensure that our limited resources be used for projects and ventures that each play a vital role in implementing our theory of youth development as it is than the various projects and ventures be coordinated among themselves.

Joint ventures involving different sectors are the exception in our current approach to social policy. Part of the reason for the low incidence of joint ventures--and their small scale when they do occur--is our emphasis to date on intrasectoral coordination (that is, among social policy agencies), and the cold fact that it requires use of already limited social policy funds to induce other sectors to work for a social policy goal that may or may not help them achieve their goals. This risk must be paid for. Moral arguments or threats of dire consequences cannot achieve the level, scale and sophistication of the joint ventures that are needed.

Up to now an activist social policy has primarily been the province of liberals and Democrats. Neither has wanted to subsidize other sectors, and has usually preferred moral arguments or predictions of disaster for the other sector, to compel the involvement of other sectors. Neither has worked to any significant degree.

4. An Emphasis on Private Involvement and Capacity Building.

Successful development for most Americans has always been a private affair, carried out in the web of family, neighborhood, friends, and the connections generated through those private involvements. The organizations that have carried out many so-called social policy functions were, until the growth of modern public bureaucracies, largely private organizations, developed and operated by private citizens who were intimately involved in the local web of private interactions wherein the organization was situated.

The need for public policy involvement and financial support in those basic development functions arises largely because of social and economic changes that have eroded private capacities to do so. But that need does not need to translate directly into the substitution of public sector for private activities. That substitution generates conflict with our basic cultural values, and does not build the local private capacities, which are in fact the essence of growing up successfully in America.

The last 15 years have seen the erosion of public support for private community-based organizations, the exact vehicles that are best equipped by nature to carry out the human development functions of a privately-oriented society that can no longer be carried out without public support. Much of that erosion is due to cutting of social policy budgets, which largely hurt these private community organizations and not public bureaucracies. Another source is the professionalized, individual problem- and service-oriented approach to social policy, which is usually carried out by public bureaucracies rather than by locally-based, private organizations.

The reputation of these local private organizations has also been hurt by our current approach to social policy. They have been and are more aware than any social policy expert or evaluator that short-term problem-oriented approaches do not allow the long-term, supportive connections to youth that can bring out their strengths, and can help them through the continuous crises and fateful temptations that their adolescence and environment endlessly brew. They also know that those approaches do not substitute for basic opportunities, and for safety. Their attempts to do what they know should be done, to create safety by informal means and to agitate for more basic needs have in many cases made them no friends of the very public agencies that provide them funds and regulate their activities.

Yet they are the operational link between our country's basic values about human development and limited public involvement in that process, and our need for greater public financial support for successful youth development.

The other aspect of private involvement that is necessary is individual: family members, the youth themselves, and in some localities, the youth leaders of private self-sufficiency organizations called "gangs." Without their active participation in the creation, implementation and ongoing assessment of their social infrastructure, its activities and joint ventures--not as service recipients, but as involved parties--any approach we might think of as "new" will not be new at all. And it will be unlikely to generate the characteristics of initiative and responsibility which are critical to successful youth development, and later economic success. Once again, it is private, community-based organizations that have the best potential to achieve such involvement from community individuals.

5. Implementation and the Future.

There is currently substantial planning work being done in the first two elements: substantive theory and measure development. The private sector in particular has substantial experience in successful joint ventures; we do not lack models or lessons for the third element. The fourth element--private capacity building and initiative--seems to be the province in practice of philanthropies, in theory of political conservatives, and thus has only a modest place in most major public social policy initiatives. But much is known about its practice.

So there is much to be hopeful about in terms of the four elements, when they are viewed separately. There are even several national multi-site initiatives, and some purely local initiatives, that are developing initiatives that appear to contain all four elements. But these initiatives are for the most part privately funded and initiated, and even if they were later judged effective, it is not clear that the groundwork required to meet the barriers of social culture and political system discussed earlier will have been dealt with sufficiently to allow their transition to public social policy.

If we are as a nation to adopt a new approach to social policy for disadvantaged youth, it may be that we need a new institutional vehicle--some type of quasi-public youth policy development

institution whose governing board includes private citizens as well as representatives from the major federal departments that provide funding to youth initiatives. Clearly part of the reason it is so difficult to even imagine having a coherent new approach to youth policy is that the public apparatus for creating and carrying out youth policies is so fragmented and entrenched. Rather than keep trying for their coordination, it may be time to create a new vehicle that is capable of testing a coherent new approach.

The idea of a new institutional vehicle would not seem to be either liberal or conservative, Democratic or Republican, but rather only American practicality--especially if it is 1) not part of the permanent government apparatus, but rather a special, public/private vehicle to test a new approach on a serious scale; 2) is funded only by diverting from current agencies that portion of their youth funding that currently goes to coordination or community process initiatives, and is supplemented by philanthropic funds; and 3) is required to establish goals and measures, and report regularly and publicly on progress toward achieving them.

Establishing such a vehicle may prove to be politically impossible. That does not prevent new approaches--some with elements like the four above, others with different features--from being tried, as they are being even now. Some would argue that such dispersal and variety of effort represents the most basic American value of all--competition, the decentralized strategy of achieving improvement. The fact that the public policy consumer market for choosing a new approach was set up for, and perhaps can only accommodate and implement, the old approach, is the critical roadblock to believing that any promising new approach or approaches will ever be adopted as a coherent public social policy.

One thing is clear: social policy for disadvantaged youth today continues to appear fragmented, marginal and ineffective. Just changing that appearance--much less the reality underlying it--requires some bold thinking and communicating about what to do, how to do it, and how to measure if it works.